

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1733
USIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY BONN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRAGUE 3623

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, CSCE, CZ
SUBJECT: CZECHOSLOVAK - US PRESS RELATIONS

USIA FOR IEU; BONN FOR USIS-PRESS ATTACHE

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY CAN INCREASE DISTRIBUTION OF SPEKTRUM FROM 1,500 TO 6,000 COPIES PER ISSUE; MURRAY SEEGER "WILL HAVE TO WAIT A WHILE" BEFORE GETTING A CZECHOSLOVAK VISA; "THE GOC'S PLANS TO PUBLICLY SELL A LIMITED NUMBER OF WESTERN NEWSPAPERS HAS BEEN POSTPONED, OWING TO CURRENCY PROBLEMS; AND AN MFA PRESS OFFICE SPOKESMAN INDICATES CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF DIRECT TV SATELLITE BROADCASTS TO ITS LISTENERS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSION OF BILATERAL PRESS MATTERS, LADISLAV SOBR, MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT'S AMERICAN DESK OFFICER, TOLD THE PAO DECEMBER 22:

3. SPEKTRUM (USIA'S CORE MAGAZINE) DISTRIBUTION CAN BE INCREASED FROM 1,500 TO 6,000 COPIES PER ISSUE. SOBR PRESENTED AN AIDE MEMOIRE SAYING THE MFA PERMITS DISTRIBUTION OF THE PUBLICATION, IT MUST BE REGISTERED ANNUALLY, AND FIVE COPIES OF EACH ISSUE
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SHOULD BE SENT TO THE MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT.

4. IN CONVERSATION, HE REFERRED TO EMBASSY'S LETTER OF SEPTEMBER 7, 1976, INFORMING MFA OF INCREASE IN DISTRIBUTION OF USIS PUBLICATION.
AWARE OF DISTRIBUTION FIGURES FOR COMPARABLE AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS

ELSEWHERE IN EE, SOBR SAID MFA DECIDED TO ALLOW INCREASE IN DISTRIBUTION OF SPEKTRUM, BUT WITHOUT MENTIONING SPECIFIC FIGURE IN ITS RESPONSE. "YOU ARE FREE TO DISTRIBUTE SPEKTRUM FOUR OR SIX TIMES A YEAR IN WHATEVER QUANTITIES YOU WANT," HE TOLD PAO, ADDING "BUT REMEMBER TO REGISTER IT EACH YEAR."

5. MURRAY SEEGER VISA QUESTION -- MFA OFFICIAL SAID, "IT WILL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE MR. SEEGER WILL GET A VISA TO VISIT CZECHOSLOVAKIA."

PAO ASKED IF THIS MEANT SEEGER WAS PERMANENTLY BARRED FROM CZ? SOBR SAID, "NO, POSSIBLE HE COULD COME AS PART OF A HIGH-LEVEL VISIT, SUCH AS MIGHT ORIGINATE IN THE WHITE HOUSE OR STATE DEPARTMENT," BUT NOTHING SEEGER OR THE EMBASSY COULD DO WOULD LEAD TO A REVERSAL OF HIS VISA BAN AT PRESENT. PAO NOTED THAT SEEGER HAD BEEN TO EVERY COUNTRY IN EE DURING LAST YEAR, HIS REQUEST TO COVER LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA'S APPEARANCE IN PRAGUE WAS A LOGICAL ONE SINCE HE REPRESENTED THE MAJOR LOS ANGELES DAILY, AND SEEGER ENJOYED A REPUTATION AS AN EXPERIENCED, PROFESSIONAL JOURNALIST OF HIGH COMPETENCE.

6. SOBR SAID HE PERSONALLY HAD THOUGHT "UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE" THAT SEEGER WOULD BE GIVEN A VISA (HE HAD PREVIOUSLY INFORMED THE EMBASSY TO THIS EFFECT), BUT THAT DECISION TO DENY HIM ENTRY WAS MADE "BY HIGHER AUTHORITIES" FOR SEEGER'S "POSSIBLE NON-JOURNALISTIC ACTIVITIES." REQUEST FOR SPECIFICS OR EXAMPLE OF SUCH ACTIVITIES DREW

A BLANK AS SOBR SAID THAT WAS ALL HE HAD BEEN TOLD. ADDED THAT, AFTER SEEGER WAS DENIED VISA, MFA RECEIVED A "LETTER FROM SOFIA" BLAMING SEEGER FOR DISTURBANCE THAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN GROUP OF BULGARIAN STUDENTS, BULGARIAN CONCERT MANAGEMENT, AND LAPO
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MANAGEMENT. PAO SAID SEEGER WAS JUST ATTENDING CONCERT AND WROTE STORY AS HE SAW IT.

7. FOR BONN; INFORMATION IN PARA 5 CAN BE GIVEN TO SEEGER, BUT PLEASE DO NOT CONVEY SOURCE OR CONTENTS OF PARA 6 TO SEEGER, AS SOBR MADE POINT OF SAYING HE WAS GIVING ABOVE INFORMATION PRIVATELY AND OFF THE RECORD. HE IS ONE OF FEW GOC PRESS OFFICIALS WILLING TO GIVE MORE THAN CRYPTIC REPLIES AND POST DOES NOT WANT TO JEOPARDIZE THIS SOMETIMES USEFUL SOURCE OF INFORMATION.

8. SALE OF FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA--SOURCE SAID PM CHNOUPEK HAD PLANNED TO GIVE DECEMBER PRESS CONFERENCE, AT WHICH IT WOULD BE DISCLOSED THAT EACH CABINET MINISTRY NOW HAS A PRESS SECRETARY RESPONSIBLE FOR POSITIVELY AIDING JOURNALISTS IN OBTAINING STORIES. AT SAME CONFERENCE FM WOULD ANNOUNCE THAT ABOUT 100 COPIES EACH OF NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, LONDON TIMES, LE MONDE, FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE, NEUE SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG,

PLUS ANOTHER GERMAN, TWO AUSTRIAN, AND OTHER PAPERS FROM "CAPITALIST" WORLD AND HELSINKI SIGNATORY COUNTRIES WOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC SALE IN PRAGUE (AT INTERCONTINENTAL AND ALCRON HOTELS, PLUS A GOVERNMENTAL FOREIGN PRESS STORE) AND IN BRATISLAVA, BRNO AND OSTRAVA.

9. HOWEVER, ACTION HAS BEEN POSTPONED BECAUSE FM DECIDED HE DID NOT WANT TO GIVE PRESS CONFERENCE BUT WILL LET A DEPUTY MINISTER HOLD IT INSTEAD "AT A LATER TIME." SECOND SNAG WAS THAT MFA WANTED TELECOMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY TO PROVIDE HARD CURRENCY TO PURCHASE THE PAPERS, BUT THE LATTER MINISTRY CLAIMED IT DIDN'T HAVE THE MONEY. STILL, SOBR SAID, GOC HAS MADE HIGH-LEVEL COMMITMENT TO THE PROJECT AND IT WILL EVENTUATE IN 1977.

10. FM PRESS SECTION'S MOST TIME-CONSUMING ACTIVITY AT PRESENT IS "GETTING READY FOR BELGRADE."

11. MFA WAS "GLAD THE US-CZECHOSLOVAK CULTURAL AGREEMENT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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COMPLETED," BUT "FRANKLY WE NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE, UNTIL YOU OFFERED SOME LAST MINUTE CHANGES IN THE LANGUAGE."

12. VOLUNTEERED ONE MAJOR ITEM OF RECENT GOC DISCUSSION IS "WHAT EFFECT WILL SATELLITE TV BROADCASTING HAVE ON OUR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE FAIRLY NEAR FUTURE?" ADDED BEFORE LONG "COUNTRIES WILL HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY TO BROADCAST DIRECTLY FROM ONE CAPITAL TO THE TV SETS IN ANOTHER COUNTRY" AND THIS WILL HAVE PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

13. FYI: FORMER RADIO PRAGUE MOSCOW-BASED CORRESPONDENT, NOW A FURNACE TENDER, TOLD PAO SAME DAY DIRECT SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS OF THIS SORT "WILL HAVE THE EFFECT THE ATOM BOMB DID AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II, OR OF TEN SOLZHENITSYNS," ADDING THAT RUSSIAN AND CZECHOSLOVAK TECHNICIANS AND BROADCASTERS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO DISCUSS WAYS OF JAMMING SUCH POTENTIAL BROADCASTS FROM THE WEST. END FYI.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PRAGUE 3623

14. PAO LEFT COPY OF DECEMBER 13, 1976 NEW YORKER WITH SOBR, POINTING OUT FUWU-PAGE FAVORABLE COVERAGE OF A CZECHOSLOVAK SCIENTIST AT AN AMERICAN SYMPOSIUM ON PROBLEMS OF "MICROWAVES." SOBR WELCOMED PIECE, SAID HE WAS KEEPING A RUNNING FILE OF POSITIVE AMERICAN ARTICLES ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AND SUCH CONTRIBUTIONS WERE ALWAYS WELCOME.

15. COMMENT: THE NEWS OF GOC AGREEMENT TO A SIZABLE INCREASE IN SPEKTRUM DISTRIBUTION IS A HIGHLY FAVORABLE SIGN, A GESTURE OF SOME SIGNIFICANCE FROM THE MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT, WHICH, FRANKLY, THE POST DID NOT EXPECT. ON SEEGER, THEY DIDN'T SAY "YES", THEY SAID MOSTLY "NO", AND THEY SAY "WHY"? COMPLICATIONS ON THE PUBLIC SALE OF FOREIGN NON-COMMUNIST NEWSPAPERS, EVEN IN TOKEN QUANTITIES, WILL PRMGABLY BE PARTIALLY RESOLVED BEFORE THE BELGRADE CSCE FOLLOW-UP CONFERENCE, AS THE GOC WILL WANT TO HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW IN THE BASKET III INTERNATIONAL PRESS CATEGORY.

16. PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POINT RAISED BY THE GOC PRESS OFFICIAL, IF ONE TAKES A LONG VIEW, IS EE COUNTRIES CONCERNS OVER THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIRECT TV SATELLITE BROADCASTS FROM WESTERN CAPITALS TO TV SETS IN CITIES AND RURAL AREAS. IN THIS REGARD, HE IS ECHOING WELL-KNOWN SOVIET PREOCCUPATION WITH THIS
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SUBJECT. IF USIA HAS ANY FUTURE PLANNING GROUP IN IEU, IBS, ITV, OR ELSEWHERE, THIS PROJECT WOULD APPEAR TO BE WORTH SERIOUS STUDY-- ASSUMING IT IS NOT ALREADY UNDER CONSIDERATION.
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